Evangasimba Corisco, Sep: 1st 1851.

Oct. 1852
answered

To the Society of Inquiry
of the Theolog: Sem: Princeton

Dear Brethren.

Many of you have, in view no doubt at the close of the present session in the Sem: to go forth to labour among the perishing heathen. I wish to communicate to you a few items in regard to this field. Our mission is established on Corisco Island. wh. is about fifteen miles in circumference & contains a population of about 15 hundred persons. We chose this place mainly on account of its healthfulness and its convenience for receiving our supplies. From this island we have access to a large population on the main land, which lies round Corisco Bay from 15 to 20 miles distant. This place is well suited to be the head quarters of a large mission. Three or four hours pleasant sail will carry a missionary from this place to any of the numerous towns on the shore of the main land touching on the bay.

I wrote a letter to Walter Lowrie Esqr. containing information about the outfit of missionaries wh. may come out here. We will communicate to you any intelligence any of you may desire of that kind.

Here is a place for missionaries to acclimate where I am of the impression no danger is to be apprehended from the malignant fevers common on some parts of the Coast. I have been living here now continuously more than a year & have suffered very little from sickness. I have not however the same vigor either of body or mind which I enjoyed in America. This no one can expect in any tropical climate, One cannot sit down here & study all day. he cannot endure continuous exercise of body all day. Should he attempt either of these for a few days he would find himself completely exhausted. I presume this is the case with an individual coming from a temperate to a tropical climate in any part of the world.

Here are numbers willing to hear the gospel I have never yet since I came to Africa heard a native African scoff at religion. Wherever you meet a man if you choose to talk with him in regard to the interests of his soul you will find him a willing hearer. There is no long established system of Idolatry here which rises up before the minds of the people to exclude their attention from the truths of the gospel. The people have some Confidence in their fetishes, but their attachment to them is not strong. Their belief in Evil Spirits is strong & I think will be found an obstacle in the way of doing them good. They offer a kind of worship to these spirits and trace to their agency & to persons in league with them all the misfortunes & ills which befal them. They are very willing to have their children educated, the majority of the Corisco men are exceedingly anxious to have their boys live with white men, not caring whether they are missionaries or not so that they may be instructed in "good fashions" & learn the English language.

The Corisco or Benga language has proved more difficult than I expected. It had never been written. Of course its grammar had never been arranged nor any vocabulary of words ~~been~~ collected. We have had during our study of the language no interpreter deserving of the name at all. I have labored a good deal at it & am not yet able to preach to the people in their own tongue, There are a number of men here who understand some English and who are willing to act as interpreters. they seem more expert at catching the drift of a discourse when they hear a paragraph at a time than litterally understanding or interpreting a single phrase or sentence. We have always preached here yet through interpreters. but how much truth has reached the minds of the people we are of course unable to say. I hope soon to be able to preach to them directly without an interpreter. The language will I think be comparatively easy of acquisition after it has once been reduced to system.

I need not recount to you now the sore bereavement with wh. it has pleased God to visit this mission in its infancy. I am now here alone but my interest is more & more enlisted in behalf of this people. It would give me unfeigned pleasure to welcome some of your brethren as labourers here, May God in his Providence direct you all to such fields as he shall see best suited to your natural dispositions and talents. Wherever our Saviour has a people there he will appoint those means which shall secure their salvation.

Your Christian brother. James L. Mackey